

Chautauqua Historical Society

Volume 7, Issue 1, Number 17

Winter 2009

- The Newsletter is published three times a year: winter, spring, and fall.
- The Newsletter is a membership benefit at the Piasa Bluffs Assembly (PBA), and Patron levels.
- PBA members have a membership in the Chautauqua Network
- CHS members are encouraged to submit articles to the editor for inclusion in the Newsletter.

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We have 18 PBA members, 67 Patron members, and will send this Newsletter to 154 households.



The Auditorium at New Piasa Chautauqua

For most of the Chautauquas across the country, the Auditorium, often called *The Tabernacle*, was the most important public building in the community. It was the platform for religion, art, music, politics, and more. Our auditorium is an 1890 structure. There is considerable evidence it is the oldest public building in the community. To us, it is simply "the Auditorium." To the rest of the Chautauqua world it was known as the Piasa Bluffs Auditorium, and later, the Piasa Chautauqua Auditorium.



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CARLI: Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois

<http://www.archive.org/details/chautauquahistor7117chau>



The President's Message

I hope you will be as excited in reading this as I am in writing it. The Historical Society will collaborate with Principia College and the Village of Elsah Museum in submitting a proposal to CARLI, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois. The proposal will ask to digitize the Jacoby Collection, now in the custody of the Village of Elsah Museum. The principal investigator is Edith List, electronic systems librarian. Jane Pfeifer, archivist for Principia College and a director of the village Museum and Historic Elsah Foundation joins Edith. Tim Tomlinson, a director of Historic Elsah Foundation, represents the Historical Society.

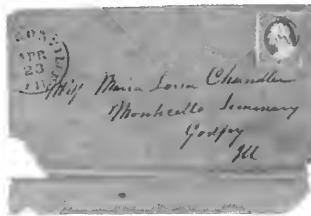
The *Jacoby Collection* consists of a large scrapbook that contains Chautauqua program books, handbills, photographs, and newspaper articles. Jack Jacoby, member of a long-time Chautauqua family, turned over the collection to the Village of Elsah Museum in the 1990s. It is currently stored at Principia College as a convenience for researchers. Tim has used it often as a source of information for his newsletter articles. He and Jane Pfeifer have talked often about making the collection more accessible, not only to Chautauquans,

but to researchers and a wider general audience.

CARLI Book Digitization Initiative is a repository of digital images, text, and audio collections. It will be a new "residence" for the *Jacoby Collection*. It's long been my dream to digitize our entire collection. Piasa Bluffs Assembly/Piasa Chautauqua/New Piasa Chautauqua is the last remaining chautauqua in Illinois, once one of more than fifty "permanent" assemblies. We are an important part of Great River Road history, Illinois history, and American history. As part of CARLI our history will be available to scholars, amateur historians, and just folks who want to know more about how we fit into the Chautauqua movement. Our founders had a keen sense of history; this project is an effort to stay in step with that long-ago group.

The envelope (image right) was downloaded from the CARLI Digital Collection. The "original" is located in *Local History Resources*, University of Illinois Springfield. The envelope is one of four pages in the CARLI file, which includes the envelope and three individual pages of a letter.

Rose Tomlinson



PRESERVATION IS PROGRESSmay we be worthy stewards...

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Printed by Suburban ReMax, Bob Jackson; color printing funded by *Piasa Bluffs Assembly* members.

The mission and purpose of the *Chautauqua Historical Society* is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community and nearby historic districts, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and other written material on New Piasa Chautauqua, remaining permanent assemblies and chautauquas in other parts of the United States and the national Chautauqua movement, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community and the general public of the historical and educational value of New Piasa Chautauqua.

Celebrate the Old

Our Administration Building was dedicated in 1934. It will celebrate its seventy-fifth birthday in 2009. Its architectural style is simple, similar to many small cottages in



The Ad Building photo was taken by **Dan Drescher** at our request, and is used with permission. Dan also provided the photo of the auditorium on our cover page. The digital sketch of the auditorium on the cover is by **Mark Hurd**, used with permission. The "Pavilion" sketch (lower right) was provided by John Schaeffer.

community. It is unique in that it is constructed of concrete blocks, with a red-slate style roof, an attractive cupola, and a small chimney that is part of a real fireplace.

The Administration Building serves some of the same purposes as its predecessor, the *House of Public Comfort*, the original building on the site. That was a wooden, two-story structure, built in 1911. Its principal reason for being was incorporated into its name: it provided public bathrooms for the many hundreds of daily visitors who came to enjoy the entertainment, listen to nationally-known speakers, and participate in the many classes offered by the Western Chautauqua. The first floor was a reception room that included a fireplace; two other first floor rooms provided toilets for men and women. The second floor was dedicated to bathing needs. Now the single-story replacement provides public toilets for men and women, office space for administration needs during

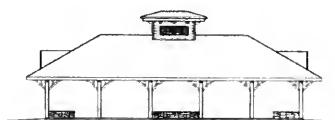
the Season, and storage space for New Piasa Chautauqua community records. The Historical Society also stores some archival records in the Administration Building. The building interior was refurbished a few years ago, thanks to the generosity of Dave and Chris Hagin and their daughter, Jenny Hagin Rausch. The *Illinois Historic Preservation Agency* specifies a structure be at least fifty years old to qualify as an historic building. Congratulations, Administration Building, at seventy-five you are well beyond the minimum age.

Welcome the New

The horseshoe pit is gone, the space occupied now by the first new public building at New Piasa Chautauqua in over seven decades. The *Christopher B. Donnelly Pavilion* is being built with the principal and interest secured over the past twelve years by the *Donnelly Family Chautauqua Trust*. Robert and Dianna Donnelly established the Trust in 1996 to benefit the Chautauqua community. As part of the agreement to construct the pavilion, the Trust has been dissolved and all available funds committed to this project. The structure is named for a son of Bob and Dianna Donnelly, who died at an early age.

The *Winter 2009 Channels* describes the structure as an open air covered pavilion that is designed to suggest the architectural lines of our historic auditorium. NPC president John Schaeffer provided a sketch of the design for inclusion in this issue of the Newsletter. John reminded Chautauquans in the recent *Channels* that this project was a priority with Bill Jackson, one of Bill's hopes for carrying us into the 21st century while preserving our past. As the auditorium reminds us our forefathers had foresight and wisdom, so will the pavilion be a tribute to Bill's determination and the Donnelly's generosity. Thank you, Donnelly family. Thank you, Bill Jackson. Thank you, NPC Board

PROPOSED NEW PAVILLION CHAUTAUQUA, ILLINOIS



The Lost Season

What happened in 1908? There is no official Program book for 1908.

As a matter of historical record, when you look at early program books, say 1904, you will see the announcement that this (1904) is our Chautauqua's twenty-first annual season. For some reason, probably to "improve" our chronological ranking among Illinois and national chautauquas, the publicists floated the idea our community began in 1883 when a camp meeting was held in the area. Not so, as a chautauqua, we began in 1885.

Dates are important; getting them correct is important. It appears there is no program book for 1908 because there was no official program to describe. Why?

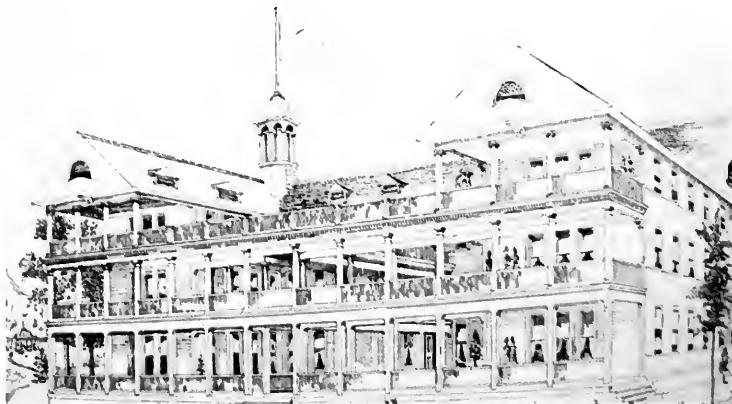
We believe *The Panic of 1907* tells part of the story. Financial panics and bank runs occurred frequently in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They followed the same general pattern. The difficulties of a prominent speculator would be widely publicized and would damage public confidence in the financial system. Investors would panic. They would scramble to cut their losses. Frequently the speculators were also bank officers, so when the game was on, worried depositors would rush to withdraw their money from any bank associated with a suspected speculator. If a bank couldn't meet its depositors' demands for cash, panic would spread to other banks.

With far less government regulation of the financial system than we have today and without a government welfare "safety net," many Americans suffered sudden and dramatic reversals of fortune when a panic struck. Even in a relatively mild panic, fortunes evaporated and lives ended in ruin. Remember, there was no federal deposit insurance until 1933. If a bank failed, depositors had little hope of ever seeing their money again. Sound familiar? Remind you of anything? Anytime?

By any possible measurement, the 1907 Assembly was one of the most ambitious ever attempted at Piasa Chautauqua. The program book describes a diverse and grand Assembly period that lasted six weeks. Devotional exer-

cises were held every weekday morning in the Auditorium. Most evenings included a 7:30 p.m. concert, followed by a longer concert or a movie. Several "Days" were scheduled: Merchants' and Farmers' Day, Sunday School Day, Woodmen's Day, WCTU Day, and Athletic Day. William Jennings Bryan, who had canceled an appearance the previous year, addressed a large Auditorium crowd on August 1, Bryan Day. Senator Robert Taylor (a one-term Senator and former Governor of Tennessee) spoke on Bob Taylor Day, and Senator Robert M. LaFollette, one of the country's foremost populist politicians, spoke on LaFollette Day, August 15. The schools had many offerings, the kindergarten program was in place, the hotels and boarding houses full, the Piasa Spring wa-

Architect's sketch, Hotel Chautauqua, circa 1904. Image from Archival files, Chautauqua Historical Society.



ter was still the finest in the world, and Piasa Chautauqua celebrated a new designation—the Pioneer Assembly of the Mississippi Valley.

It is not certain what effect the Panic of 1907 had, or might have had, on the Western Chautauqua. However, summer 1908 was full of contradictory expectations and anticipations for Piasa Chautauqua, full of false starts, unexpected beginnings, fears of uncharted journeys, and fears about unknown results. There was no official program in 1908. Yet, excursion steam-boats still plied the River, and trains transported vacationers and special parties to Piasa Chautauqua. The pool was open for business. Some things were the same; some things were profoundly different. We will continue this story of civic darkness in the Spring 2009 issue of the Newsletter.

About the Newsletter

The Winter 2009 issue of the Newsletter is the seventeenth such publication. The first “official” Newsletter in 2003 was preceded by a two-page flyer distributed in mid-summer of that year.

The Newsletter is an official publication of the Chautauqua Historical Society, an important benefit of membership. It was always our plan to publish it three times a year. “Deadlines” are pretty ambiguous. In the beginning we would list an issue as published for “September 2004” or some similar designation, figuring to publish in February, and again in May. The “editor/principal writer” discovered more flexibility when listing issues as “fall, winter, and spring” rather than specific months. This strategy was adopted with alacrity and great enthusiasm.

Tim Tomlinson is the editor/principal writer. Tim shares his copy with copy/proof editors before final publication. Kathy Brammeier, Gary Cooper, Chris Hagin, and Susan Seiber have volunteered to proof copy and recommend changes. Tim has an understanding with these folks, *caveat scriptor*: recommended changes/improvements will be considered carefully, but in the end, Tim has to stand behind what appears in the publication, so he makes the final decisions. For the record, the volunteer editors are tremendously helpful and valuable to the publication process.

There is no editorial board. Topics are “discovered” through an analysis of activities in the community (e.g., the new pavilion building cited in this issue), when reporting on important programs in a Season (e.g., the 4th of July flag ceremony), an interest in local history (e.g., an article on the historic dairy farm in Grafton that is now the Illinois Youth Center at Pere Marquette, or the architectural work of Bernard Maybeck at Principia College), and general research in archival materials.

There is an open invitation for CHS members (and non-members) to submit articles for publication. Matt Pyatt wrote a great article, complete with pictures, about his visit with wife Becky Hagin Pyatt to the Mother Chautauqua. Bob Hormell wrote an excellent article on *Roque* at New Piasa Chautauqua. We printed an article by Karen Foss on the Hamilton School in Otterville. Paul Brammeier contributed two articles, one on William Jennings Bryan and the other on Pacific Palisades Chautauqua, a California chautauqua outside Los Angeles. The late Phil Polster contacted Tim to share his interest in possible Chinese exploration in the Mississippi Valley and a possible connection to the legend of the

Piasa Bird. We hope more of you will share your knowledge about New Piasa Chautauqua. What about the lighthouse? Someone out there could write that article. What about “naming rights” at Chautauqua—Flint Park, Schwaninger Field, the Joe A. Meisel Swimming Pool, the new pavilion?

Selection of a cover and the “lead” article is important. They are almost always related, with the lead article taking up at least three pages—the cover and two additional pages. Tim takes most of the cover photos, but other Chautauquans have contributed. Mark Hurd created a new piece of digital art for the “Tenting at Chautauqua” cover. Herb Milster provided the cover photo for the issue on Chautauqua memorials, and Dan Drescher and Mark Hurd contributed to the cover of this issue, Winter 2009.

Newsletter-related research takes Tim to many places. He has three bases: an office room at the Tomlinson cottage, the Administration Building where archival material is stored, and the Marshall Brooks Library at Principia College where a study carrel is assigned to him, and where he can access the *Jacoby Collection*, curated by the Village Museum of Elsah. His travels have taken him to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in Springfield, the Missouri Historical Society, the St. Louis Public Library, the public libraries in Alton, Jerseyville, Lincoln, and Havana, Illinois, the Jersey County Historical Society, the library at McKendree University, and the libraries at the University of Iowa and Washington University of St. Louis. Tim is still “tracking down” information on our first president, Benjamin St. James Fry, and plans to visit the Western Historical Manuscript Library in Columbia, MO and Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, OH to look through their collections of Fry’s papers.

Membership dues fund the Newsletter. We actively recruited members to join at the *Piasa Bluffs Assembly* level so we can pay for some color pages, four in this issue. The Newsletter is sent to a number of institutions to be archived and made available to anyone interested in NPC and the Chautauqua movement. Those Chautauquans who are not members of CHS can review a cumulative copy in our Chautauqua library.

Do the math. This is the seventeenth issue of the Newsletter, creating almost one hundred forty pages of information, both words and pictures, additions to our common heritage. Taken as a whole, we have a small book, one that is and will be constantly growing. As far as we know, we are the only remaining independent chautauqua that produces such a newsletter.

About our Auditorium and others

Several years ago, at the height of a lovely New York autumn, Tim and Rose Tomlinson visited the "Mother Chautauqua." Tim spent his mornings at the Smith Memorial Library where at the time the Chautauqua Institution archival files were stored. With the aid of the archival staff, Tim was able to read through the materials that related to our Western Chautauqua.

Tim took notes and paid to have some pages copied. Most of the material consisted of brief reports, dated by year of origin, sent to New York from our Chautauqua. The reports were printed in a monthly magazine.

The report for 1890 tells us the auditorium construction was completed in time for the Assembly program that year. This information is at odds with New Piasa Chautauqua's 1982 application to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for historic district status. In that application the auditorium is listed as a *circa* 1904 building, which is almost certainly inaccurate.

Chautauqua historian Ralph Osborn believed the Auditorium was built in 1893 from locally hand-hewn timbers, constructed because a large tent that was ordered for the season failed to arrive.* This may fall into the category of "rural myth," since we can find no confirming evidence/other sources to support this claim. That said, we have not fully researched Osborn's notes for his book, so it's possible we will come across additional information in the future.

Osborn includes an 1896 photograph of the Auditorium interior in his book. He calls the setting a "picturesque gem." Gas lamps for evening use lighted the building. Three separate sections, just as today, provided seating for the audience, then on long rows of benches instead of our current wooden individual seats. The stage boasted a piano and an organ, even back in the days of the Piasa Bluffs Assembly. The Auditorium was, he says, the picture of patriotic fervor, with American flags and bunting everywhere.



Source: Jacoby Collection, Village of Elsah Museum, Piasa Chautauqua Herald sketch, August 1896; below, 1896 Program Book cover.



Mark Hurd digital image, Children's Day backdrop, used with permission.

Osborn also states the Auditorium was enlarged in 1903. We are not certain what that means specifically. It does bring up a matter of some curiosity for historians, amateur or otherwise. It is fair to say that the *public relations* folks of the late 19th and early 20th bear a strong resemblance to today's "Mad Men" of Madison Avenue. For our Chautauqua, and for many of the other remaining (or lost) chautauquas, the figures that tell us how many people attended any given performance, platform speech, or religious service, are simply not believable. We read that in 1912 our Auditorium seated 2500 people. Where did they put them? The attendance figures for a speech by William Jennings Bryan tell us several thousand people listened to this famous silver-tongued orator.

The inclination to exaggerate was not limited to our Chautauqua, by any means. It is often difficult to accept the claims for program attendance at some of the permanent assemblies, and for the "tent" chautauquas as well. That said, some of the permanent assemblies did have large seating capacities. The Camp Meeting auditorium at Ocean Grove, New Jersey could and did seat ten thousand at one time, and the "auditoria" at Lakeside, Ohio and Boulder, Colorado could accommodate around two thousand guests.

The Hillside (the area between the building and Alton Street) was often an extension of the Auditorium proper. Morning religious services were held on the Hillside, and choirs and bands performed, using the west side of the building as a stage backdrop. Today the Hillside is the site for the Clarkson Memorial Sundial and the community flagpole.

* Ralph Osborn, *The History of New Piasa Chautauqua, 1885-1985*.



Many CHS members have visited *Bay View, Michigan*. In 1875, a group of Michigan Methodists organized a Camp Meeting in 1875, which would open the following year. They chose a lakeside site on Lake Michigan, part of Little Traverse Bay. Ten years later, a thriving summer community was witness to the power of the Chautauqua idea. Today the Bay View Association is one of the largest of the remaining “Independent Chautauquas.” The community was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1987, joining the Chautauqua Institution with such a designation.



Bay View is well known, deservedly, for its religious, educational, art and music programming. The Bay View Music Festival calls itself the country’s oldest music festival, featuring a school of music and a venue for the performing arts. Summer concerts range from classical to jazz, directed to all age groups. Though there are several settings for music productions, the main site is the historic **John M Hall Auditorium**.

Top left, John M Hall Auditorium image, downloaded from digitalpast.org; lower image with flag from Bay View Music Festival website, 2008.

The **Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association** of the Methodist Episcopal Church (OCGMA) was organized in 1869. Within a year, the New Jersey State Legislature chartered it. The first camp meeting was on “God’s Square Mile” on the Jersey Shore. OCGMA is close to Trenton and Newark, and about equally distant from New York and Philadelphia.

The OCGMA Auditorium has been often called **The Great Auditorium**. What a fascinating story it has told. It started as a “Preacher’s Stand” that accommodated seventy-five people but provided no protection from the elements. A small frame structure was built in 1875. It had a roof of tree boughs, with still no protection on rainy days at the Shore. A real roof was added a year later. The new open-air structure claimed to seat 3,000 people. This was a religious structure; preaching continued to be the order of the day.

A huge structure was built to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of OCGMA, an auditorium/temple/tabernacle that could seat 10,000 people. It was completed, on time for the 1894 Camp Meeting. The current capacity, changed by late 20th century renova-



Auditorium images downloaded from Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association website. Above, 19th century representation of the Great Auditorium; below, the Great Auditorium today.





Originally known as the "Way of Truth Temple," the Temple at **Ocean Park, Maine** was built in 1881. As its name connotes, the **Temple** was designed for religious programs, but has been used over the years for cultural and education events as well.

The Temple is octagonal in shape, and seats around eight hundred people. It boasts an historic organ and a grand piano to serve program needs of this New England Chautauqua's ten week annual season. The Temple was added to the *National Register of Historic Places* in 1982, along with three other buildings in this *Chautauqua By the Sea* community.

Ocean Park is located a few miles south of Portland, Maine and can be reached easily from I-95 or US 1 and US 1A. The entire area is open to the public at all times.

(Photo left, downloaded from Ocean Park website.)

The Colorado Chautauqua Association Auditorium in Boulder, CO was given "National Historic Landmark" status in 2007, a significant distinction beyond its previous "National Historic Place" status. A designation made by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, "Landmark" status is given only to properties recognized as being "of national significance" and possessing "exceptional value or quality in illustrating and interpreting the heritage of the United States."

Originally the **Texas-Colorado Chautauqua**, this community started in 1898. The construction of an auditorium was the first order of community business. We're told construction began in early May 1898, and the building was ready for a July 4th gala opening. Think of it, only seven weeks. Reports of the period claim that over 4000 people attended the opening events, with seating space for about two thousand. The dirt floor was covered with sawdust; people sat on pine benches.



Construction, c. 1898

Wisconsin "Progressive" spoke at the Piasa Chautauqua auditorium. John Phillip Sousa's band appeared in Boulder in 1904, after the regular season had concluded.

Today, the Colorado Chautauqua Association auditorium is the home of the Colorado Music Festival (CMF). By the 1970's the auditorium was in a rundown, even dilapidated condition. The CMF is credited with saving it by providing funds and a rationale for its continued existence. Today, proud of its Landmark title, the auditorium is the annual venue for an impressive array of national musical artists, classic silent films and educational forums.



One hundred years later. Photos downloaded from CCA website.

